

FOREWORD BY BERNIE S. SIEGEL, M.D.

HOW I stayed
alive when
my brain was
trying to kill me

One Person's Guide to
Suicide Prevention



"The best suicide prevention manual."

Iris Bolton, Executive Director
National Resource Center for Suicide Prevention and Aftercare

SUSAN ROSE BLAUNER

Operation Decisive Victory

Skill Building & Mental Health Strategies
for Overcoming Suicidal Ideation

presented by SUSAN BLAUNER

OPERATION DECISIVE VICTORY

What we need
from YOU

C.A.R.E.

The ABCs

“HI”

What we need
to THRIVE

H.O.W.

Strategic
Action

5 System
Integration

healing is possible

and it is a slow process



briefing

contributing factors

severe loss (mother's death)
multiple trauma (sexual abuse, bullying)
unmet developmental needs

resulting in

(untreated) depression
borderline personality disorder
post-traumatic stress disorder

which led to

18 years of active suicidal ideation
3 attempts/gestures • 4 hospitalizations
29 years of therapy ... and counting
21 years on meds ... and counting



What we
need from you

C.A.R.E.

The ABCs

“HI”

C Compassion

A Acceptance

R Respect

E Empathy

C

Compassion

- Remember, we didn't sign up for any of this
- Suicidal thoughts and behaviors are a direct result of trauma, illness, and situation
- At any given moment, we are doing the best we can, even if we're acting out
- Please, never lose faith in us
- Change feels threatening
- What will fill the hole?

A

Acceptance

- We need to feel accepted before we can feel safe to change
- Recognize our strengths and use them
- See us as whole, competent people
- Believe in our ability to grow, even if we act out
- Remain open to our experience, even if you don't understand or believe it

R

Respect

- Each of us is a unique, sacred being
- We are more than a diagnosis
- We have individual likes and dislikes
- We are worthy of love
- Despite self-defeating behavior/beliefs, we are smart and valuable

E

Empathy

- Acknowledge our pain
- Remember we were once innocent children
- Imagine yourself with a history like ours; how would you feel? What would you need?
- Treat us with consistent kindness, even when we piss you off

exercise #1

reveille

A photograph of two soldiers in silhouette, facing each other against a bright sunset or sunrise sky. The soldier on the left is wearing a helmet and sunglasses, and has an American flag patch on his sleeve. The soldier on the right is also in silhouette, wearing a helmet and sunglasses, and is holding a radio. The text "we need you" is centered in the image.

we need you





A photograph of two soldiers in silhouette, facing each other in profile. They are wearing helmets and tactical gear. The soldier on the left has an American flag patch on his sleeve. The soldier on the right has a patch with the number '1' on his sleeve. They are holding communication equipment. The background is a bright, hazy sunset or sunrise over a landscape.

please be patient with us

A

Availability

B

Boundaries

C

Consistency

A

Availability

- Breathe deeply to stay present to a stressful situation
- Listen between the words
- Be professional, with personality
- Laugh with us
- Ask us what *we* think

B

Boundaries

- Maintain 100% confidentiality
- Keep session focused on client
- Make it clear that it is a therapeutic, not friend, relationship
- Hold us accountable for our actions
- Be firm about our safety
- Remember, you are the practitioner

C

Consistency

- Always treat us with a positive attitude, whatever we do
- If you feel exasperated, work it out with a colleague
- Take responsibility for counter-transference
- Have faith in us *and* in yourself
- Love and pray for us

exercise #2

creative visualization A

group sharing



H Humor

I Imagination

H

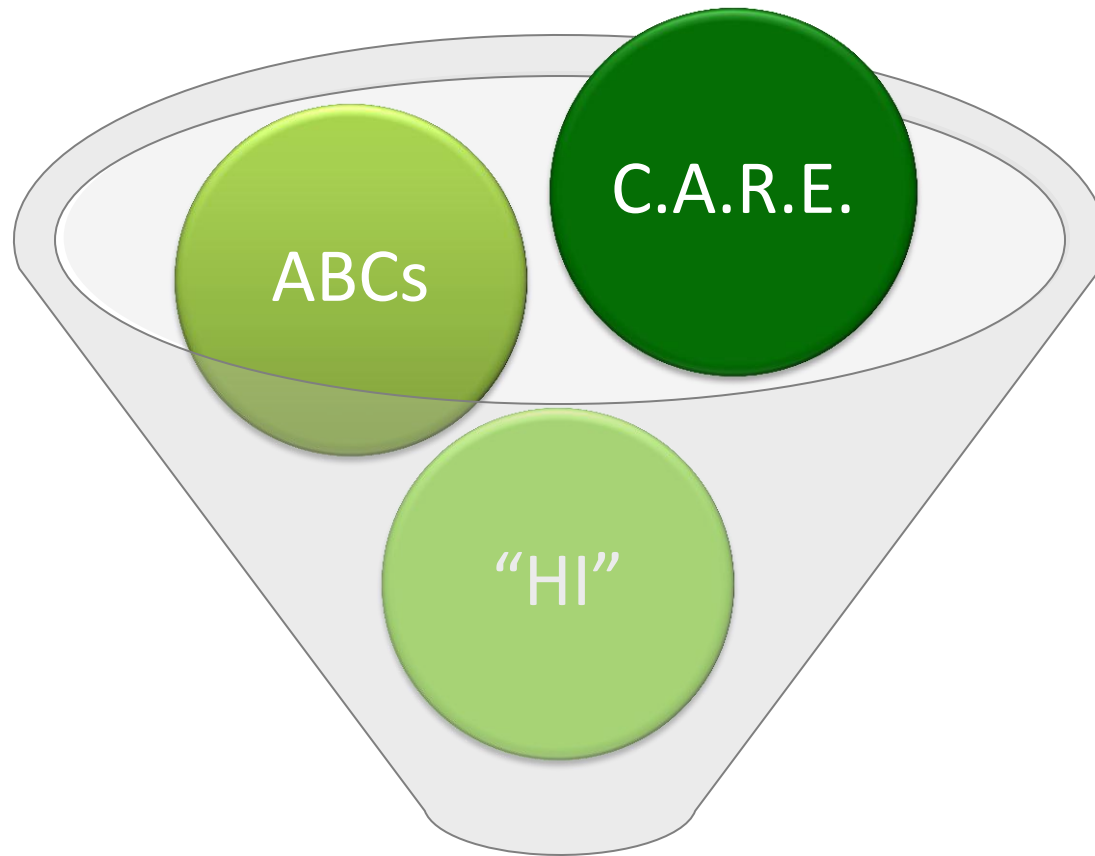
Humor

- Have a healthy sense of humor; helps us feel connected to you
- Encourage us to find ways to lighten our lives; add fun things
- Laugh with us, not at us
- Have client's make collages of people laughing/smiling

I

Imagination

- Trust yourself; be innovative
- Listen to your intuition
- Treat the person not the diagnosis
- Make it a team effort; ask for their ideas/input
- Use art/music/animals to access/process feelings



TRUST
(we have an ally)







exercise #3

the voices of depression

The Liar

The Thief

The Magician

The Bully

The Protector

The Seducer

The Opportunist

THAT VOICE IS NOT TO BE TRUSTED





What we need to THRIVE

H.O.W.

Strategic
Action

5 System
Integration

H

Hope

O

Opportunity

W

Willingness

- We need to reinforce/cultivate/find hope
 - How do we cultivate hope?
- We need to create opportunities for change
 - How do we create opportunities?
- We need to become willing to stay safe and take advantage of opportunities for change
 - How do we cultivate willingness?



Strategic Action

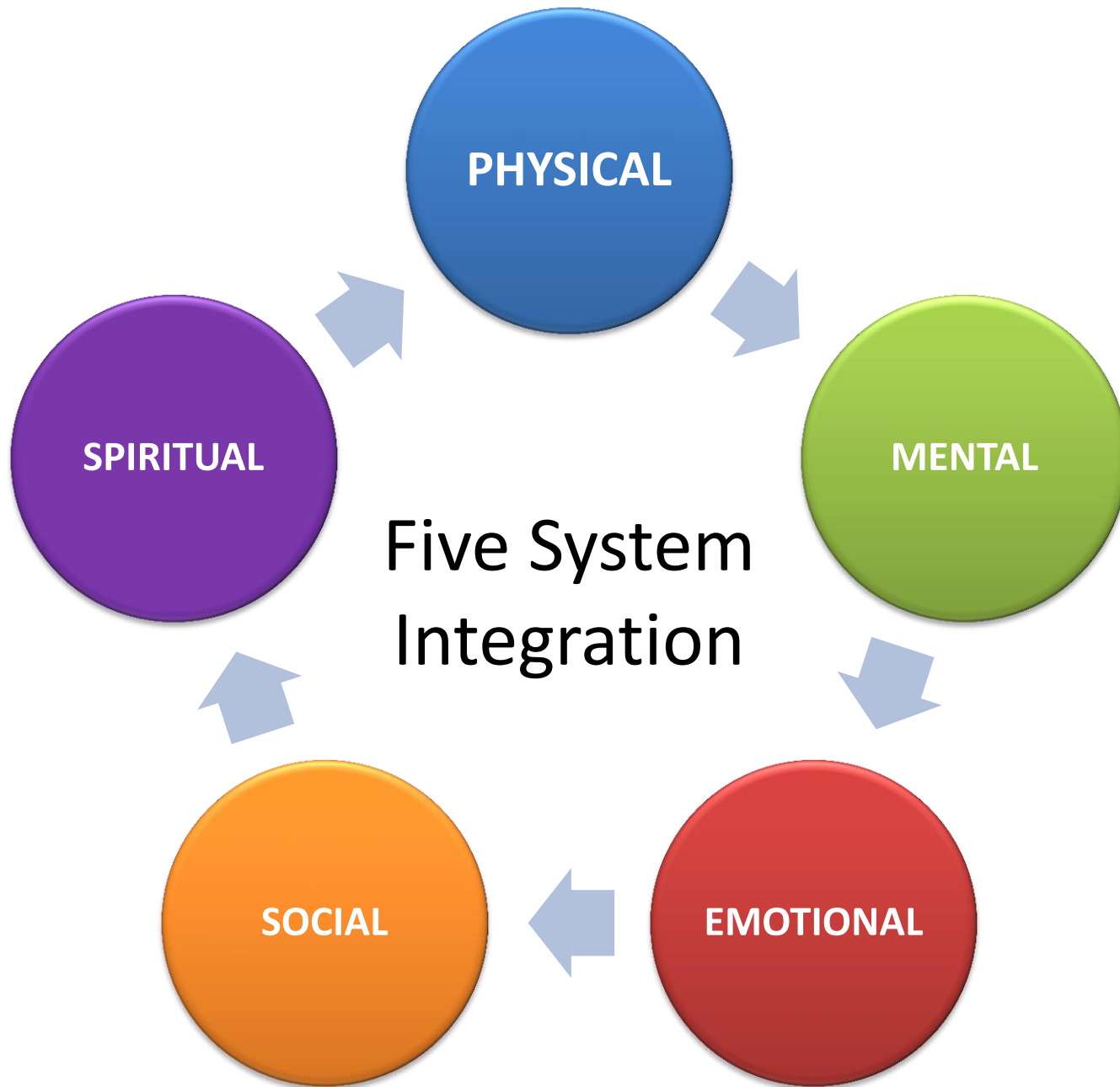
aka Tricks of the Trade

JUGGLING LIFE

Sylvia wrote:

“Trying to accommodate Susan’s ever-changing needs and presentations produced three particularly useful tools which were threaded throughout the course of treatment.”

- Journal Swapping
- Relaxation Techniques
- Art Therapy



Asking for Help *messages to give*

- It is both normal and necessary to ask for help, as a matter of fact, it is a sign of strength
- Asking for help helps other people ask for help
- Ask, “How do you feel when someone asks you for help?” and build on that.

Crisis Plan *refer to CP Brochure*

- Make sure the therapist *and* the client have a copy
- Both people sign it; therapist may put perfume /cologne
- Have client make copies to keep in many places.
- Adjust it as things change. It’s fluid. They are fluid

The Mind's I

- Brain = Organ
- BrainBody Union
- Mind Training
- SUGAR is DYNAMITE

Brain Food

- Just as our body responds well or poorly to good or bad food, so our brain responds to the information we feed it.
- Re-examine the brain diet.

Vitamin “P”

- If you had diabetes, would you take insulin?
- Medication is a safety net that supports our ability to take healthy risks for personal transformation.

The Neuron Superhighway

- Objectify the brain's physicality (we are not the mind)
- Explain stress and cortisol, adrenals, synapses, energy

Feelings

- Feelings just are. There are neither good nor bad.
- “Suicidal” is not a feeling.
- What are the feelings beneath the thoughts?
- Identifying feelings allows us to see/feel them change.
- All feelings change, with or without help from us.

Feelings Time Line (p 90-91)

Feelings Versus Facts

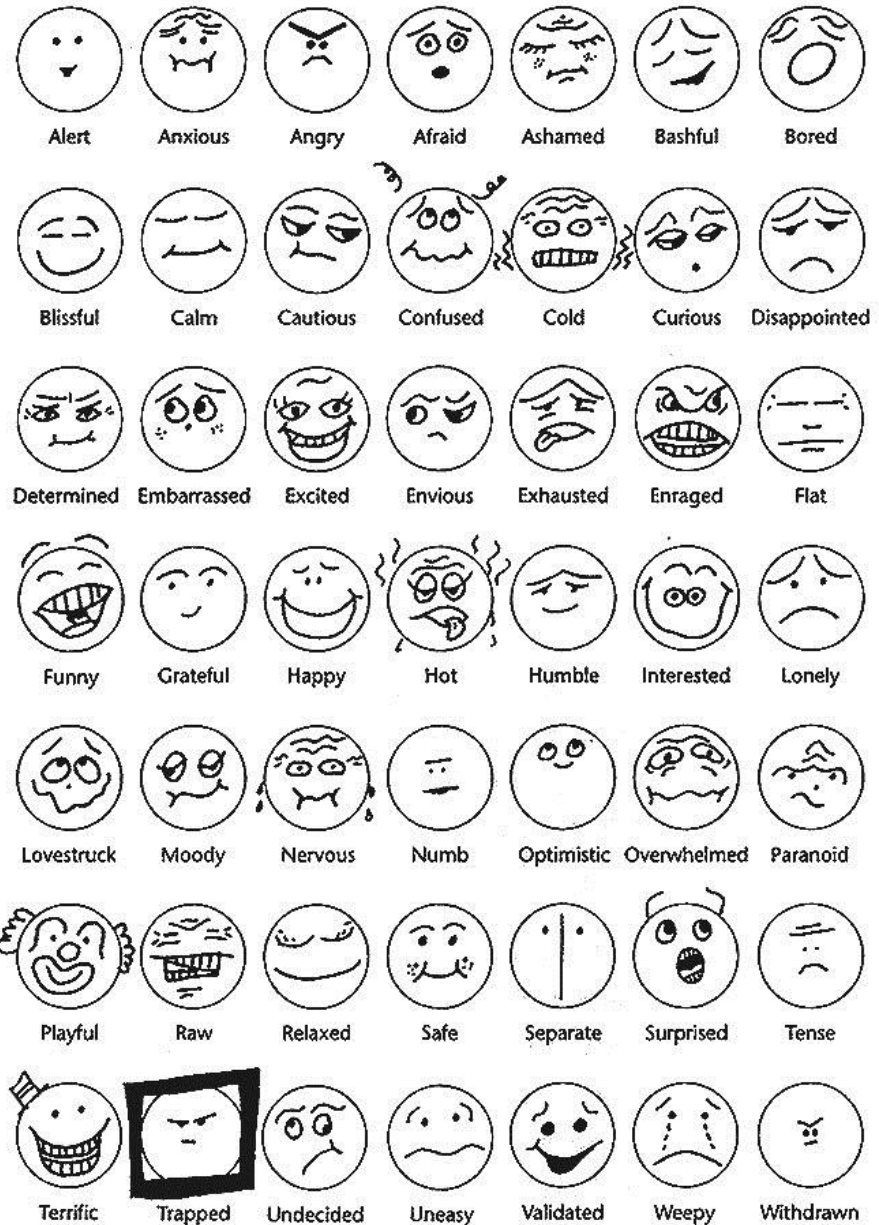
- I feel _____, but the reality is _____
- We gain objectivity and stalls the mind's momentum.

The Brady Bunch Syndrome (Social Network Syndrome)

- Comparing our situation with an artificial ideal is a setup for disappointment.

Feelings Chart

How do I feel
in this moment?



“Oh, What a Beautiful Morning”

- Sayings and affirmations help reassure the brain when it is running with feelings and thoughts. They shift our mental energy and let a sliver of light into the darkness.

Affirmations

- Have affirmation slips to give to folks at the end of a session. This gives them a tangible connection to you. Have them read it before they leave your office.

Mirror Work and Inner Dialoguing

- Both reflect back a visual experience of who we are, helping us see that we are more than our thoughts. We are a whole person, who has thoughts, and all thoughts are temporary.

exercise #3

whole person in there!

H.A.L.T.

- Stop and take a look at yourself: Are you Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired? These four states have a direct impact on the way we respond and relate to life. **** Teach about SUGAR and nutrition**

Health and Hygiene

- Healthy body promotes a healthy mind.
- Sleep deals
- Exercise rewards

Acting As If

- A fine line exists between acknowledging your feelings and being ruled by them.

Nature

- Symbiosis
- The five senses
- Connection to the Earth

Spirituality

- No matter your background or your beliefs, these are three of the most significant tools for release and relief.
- Prayer, Creating Sacred Space
- “God” Box
- Surrender -- “Turning it over”

exercise #4

creative visualization B





What did the Zen master say to the hot dog vendor?

Make me one with everything.

Session Tips

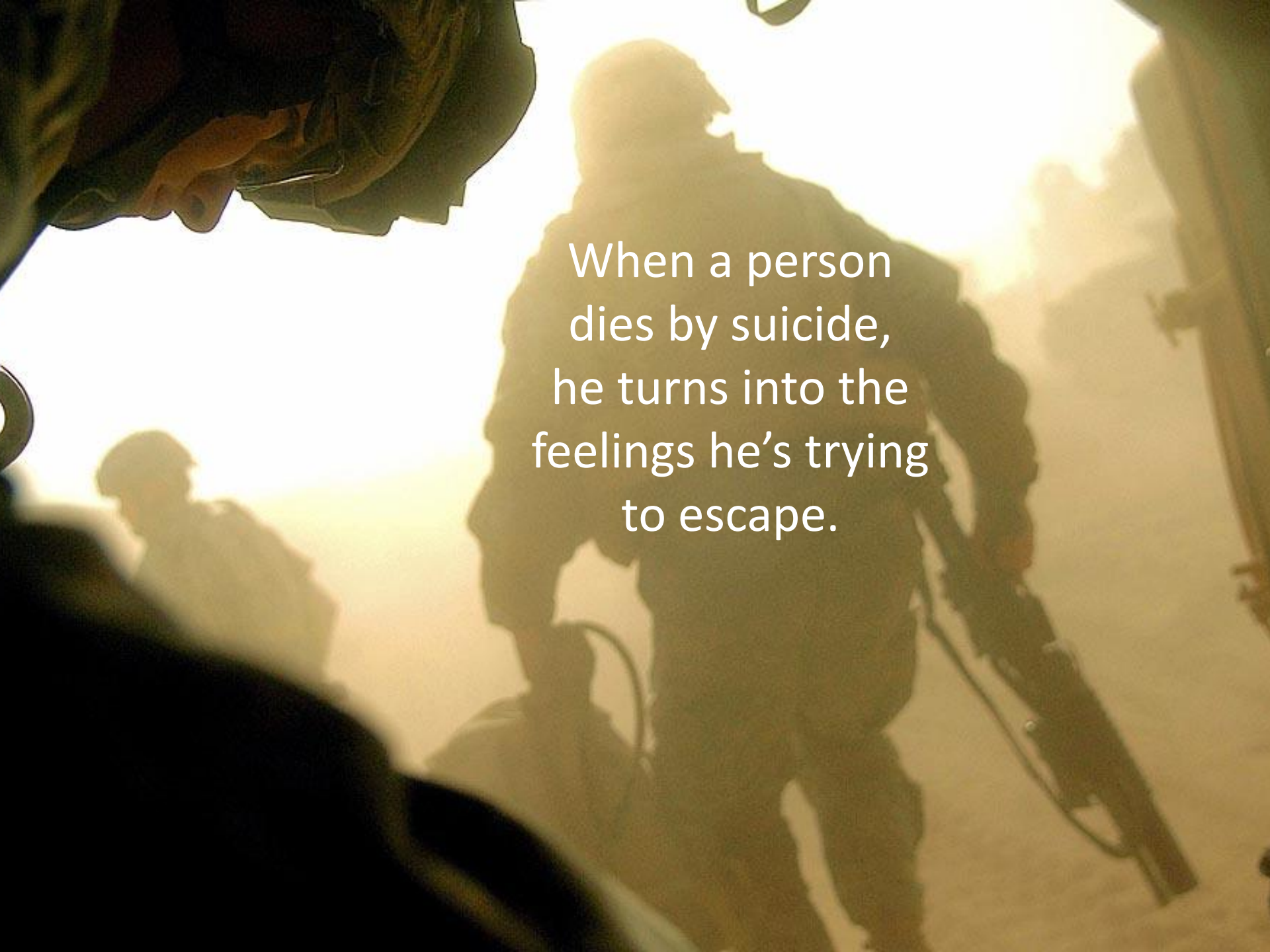
- Have adequate off-hours coverage
- Have confidential message system
- Keep sessions to 50 minutes
- Put up signs about vacations weeks prior to departure, so we can process
- Have a clock on both sides of the room, so client can budget time
- Have living things in the office
- Be mindful of fragrances/allergies
- Teach about NUTRITION

Session Tips

- Have comfortable furniture
- Re-arrange furniture every so often
- Change where you sit every 3 months
- Blow insulation into the walls
- Have solid, rather than hollow doors
- Use white noise machines inside the office door and in the lobby
- Curtain all windows
- Record sessions if client wants to, so that s/he can listen to it between sessions
- Avoid sitting behind a desk

Useful Seeds

sayings/stories that act as suicide deterrents

The image is a low-angle shot looking up at soldiers. In the foreground, the top of a soldier's head and shoulders are visible, wearing a helmet and a dark jacket. In the background, another soldier is silhouetted against a very bright, hazy light source, likely the sun. The soldier in the background is holding a rifle. The overall atmosphere is somber and contemplative.

When a person
dies by suicide,
he turns into the
feelings he's trying
to escape.

A young man was found hanging
with deep gouges around his neck.
He died trying to save his own life.

Suicide is the last decision
ever have to make.

It's okay to have suicidal thoughts,
just don't act on them.

They are JUST THOUGHTS.

Simple Encouragements



We need to know you care.

Simple, powerful words, spoken with
an open heart, and without judgment,
can open emotional doors.

I have faith in you.

You will feel better.

Borrow some of my hope for you.

Don't check out five minutes
before the miracle happens.



How can I help?

I believe in you.

Thank you for helping us find a way
through psychiatric challenges.

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"There is hope for me!"
Veteran, Washington, D.C. VAMC

www.susanroseblaurer.com